

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Mepal and Witcham Church of England Primary Academy

Brangehill Lane, Mepal, Ely CB6 2AL

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

Ely

Previous SIAS inspection grade

Good

Date of academy conversion

1 November 2014

Name of multi-academy trust

Diocese of Ely Multi Academy Trust (DEMAT)

Date of inspection

3 March 2017

Date of last inspection

5 March 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Primary 141212

Headteacher

Louise Lomax

Inspector's name and number

Caroline Clarke 711

School context

The school serves the villages of Mepal and Witcham in the East Cambridgeshire district and is a smaller than average primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The school became part of DEMAT, a multi academy diocesan trust in 2014. There have been a number of changes in teaching staff and leadership since the last inspection, with the current substantive headteacher being appointed in January 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Mepal and Witcham as a Church of England school are good

- The school has created an inviting, spiritually enriching learning environment, enhanced by strong links with local churches and the diocese.
- The strength of Christian purpose and teamwork, where all have a shared vision for the school as a church school, enables pupils to achieve and develop as confident individuals firmly grounded in the Christian faith.
- The school is proud to be a forward-thinking, positive, caring, supportive community based on the very strong Christian values that are at its core.

Areas to improve

- Develop deeper understanding of diversity across other faith communities, through visitors to the school and visits to places of worship.
- Involve pupils more regularly in planning and delivering individual acts of collective worship so that they develop a deeper understanding of Christianity and what worship means to them as individuals.

- Embed monitoring and evaluation of the school's worship and Christian character by pupils, staff and governors, so that their impact can be measured.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is good at meeting the needs of all learners

The Christian values of koinonia, meaning community, and agape, meaning love, are embedded throughout the school's daily practice and procedures. Pupils talk with knowledge and understanding about the meaning of these values and their links to the Bible. They were very keen to share a cross-shaped display depicting the members of their school as parts of a community of love. The Christian distinctiveness of the school is very visible through displays and symbols linked to worship and religious education [RE] teaching. Parents, governors and staff recognise the spirituality within the school and say that the teaching of Christian values has a positive impact on pupil behaviour. For example, parents say that pupils understand that saying sorry is important and treating others kindly as you would like them to treat you. This is a popular school where attendance is good and most pupils make at least expected progress because all pupils, including those that are vulnerable, are enabled to thrive and feel successful within the context of Christian belief and practice. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is strengthened by the opportunities they have to reflect, question and explore ideas and beliefs across the curriculum. RE contributes to the school's distinctiveness, shown for example by a display of pictures showing how Christ is represented by Christians in different parts of the world and an interactive display where children write down their thoughts about 'What does it mean when you say sorry?' Pupils enjoy learning about different religions but they do not currently benefit from visits to other places of worship and opportunities to meet people from other faiths. This is an inclusive school where all feel valued, nurtured, supported and enabled to achieve. Pupils regularly take part in fundraising events to support both local and worldwide charities. For example, they have recently raised money so that children staying in hospital can have books to read. Through these activities, pupils learn about the Christian practice of giving and helping others, linked with their school values of koinonia and agape.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is thoroughly planned by all teachers and visitors. It is delivered by a range of school staff and visitors from a number of Christian denominations, including the incumbent. The worship cycle is based on the 'Roots and Fruits' materials, with a clear focus on Christian values and the main Christian festivals.

Pupils enjoy collective worship and recognise its spiritual significance. They know that the coloured cloths on the worship table are like those used in church for particular festivals. One pupil could explain that purple is for Lent and sadness. The school is beginning to include elements from Anglican liturgy in its worship. Pupils are starting to take responsibility for aspects of collective worship, for example lighting three candles and inviting everyone to 'come together in the presence of the Lord.' Pupils can explain that the three candles represent God the father, God the son and God the holy spirit but they have yet to acquire a deeper understanding of the Trinity.

Staff and governors have started to gather feedback from pupils in relation to collective worship. However, the impact of this is yet to become embedded. Pupils say that they would like to plan and lead individual acts of worship on a regular basis.

Pupils of all ages recognise the importance of prayer. They speak with enthusiasm about the prayer tree and could give examples of how this has been used as a focus for both prayers of thanks and prayers asking for courage. Pupils also talked excitedly about the new prayer dice that they can choose to use to say grace because they understand the importance of regular thankfulness.

The school recognises that pupils need opportunities to reflect and has explored this through collective worship, classroom reflection spaces and philosophical thinking. This has resulted in pupils being more aware of the need to respect the views of others and how important it is to take time out and reflect on what they have said and done and how it may have affected others. Pupils are encouraged to make links

between the messages shared in collective worship and their behaviour throughout the day. This deepens their knowledge and understanding of Christian values shown by one pupil who explained that Zaccheus was a tax collector in the Bible who cheated and collected too much money from people. He met Jesus and listening to Jesus made Zaccheus change his ways. He gave people the money back that he owed them but he actually gave them four times as much as this. The message in the story is , 'Actions speak louder than words.' This means that at school we should all show kind actions to everyone.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good

The school's clear Christian vision is at the very heart of everything that the school achieves. The headteacher's positive, passionate and supportive leadership ensure that this vision is moving the school forward at a strong pace. She has ensured that governors and staff work in close partnership and understand their role in communicating and upholding the vision and ethos. Governors recognise the strengths of the school as a church school and challenge the headteacher, thus ensuring from a strategic point of view that developing the Christian distinctiveness of the school is always a key priority. This is strengthened by close links with the diocese and DEMAT which have further enriched the school's Christian purpose. For example, governors, staff and the DEMAT have worked together on training activities to help strengthen the Christian ethos and direction of the school such as embedding Christian values and ensuring the school has Christianity at its core.

Priorities for nurturing and growing the Christian ethos of the school are a prominent feature of the school improvement and development plan. RE leadership is developing well as a result of clearly focussed training and opportunities the school has created for staff to observe best practice in other church schools. This has resulted in good curriculum development, better teacher subject knowledge and confidence and opportunities going forwards for teachers to be supported in their practice and the tracking of progress to be more precise.

The local incumbent is welcomed into the school and works closely with teachers to ensure that the local churches are used as a resource for teaching RE. For example, the school is participating in the Bishop's Lent Challenge which will culminate in pupils making a pilgrimage to Mepal Church. The incumbent has spent time both in classrooms and at the church with pupils teaching them through role play about Christian baptism, marriage and funerals. Pupils have also had opportunities to ask both the incumbent and other visiting Christians about their faith. The school worships at both local churches regularly and parental support is strong. Pupils and parents speak positively about, for example, Harvest and Christingle Services and the pupils' roles within these. The delivery of RE and collective worship meets statutory requirements. There is good communication with parents and as a result they speak highly of the school's links with the church and its Christian ethos and values. They recognise that these aspects of the school are more prominent since the appointment of the current headteacher.

Governors monitor and evaluate collective worship and RE. This has included looking at the use of reflection spaces and the prayer tree and talking to pupils about individual acts of worship and their visits to the church linked to the RE curriculum. However, this monitoring is not fully embedded so its impact on further development of the Christian distinctiveness has yet to be measured.

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